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55-2467

THE WHITE HOUSE
 WASHINGTON

October 7, 1955

TO HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

As you know, it is an approved Federal policy to utilize physically handicapped citizens, to the maximum extent consistent with the needs of the Government service, in positions they can fill efficiently and without hazard to themselves or others. Noteworthy progress has been made during recent years to carry out this policy and to promote a better understanding of the potentialities of the physically handicapped. However, because this is an area which needs year-round emphasis, I would like to call to your attention statements made recently before the annual meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped.

In opening the meeting President Eisenhower said:

"We have a country dedicated to equality of opportunity. We make much in many Fourth of July speeches that this equality of opportunity goes to all, regardless of race, color, religion, and so on. It seems to me that we might extend it, at least within our own hearts and minds, to include: 'Or to any who may be somewhat physically different or handicapped so long as that person can be made a useful member of society.

"No one wants to be a ward of charity. Indeed, this word 'Opportunity' seems to me to contain much that means happiness for the human--opportunity to expand and to be useful, to know that he is contributing his share to the advancement of that great society of which he is a part. . .

". . . we cannot afford for one moment to neglect placing opportunity in front of all that are capable of doing anything whatsoever with it. And the mere fact that a person may be minus a limb or one of his senses, or anything else, has nothing to do with it, anymore than do the other differences among humans that we conclude should not be allowed to sway us in the government that is applied to all."

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In commenting on the experience of the Post Office Department in hiring the physically handicapped, L. Rohe Walter, representing Postmaster General Summerfield, stated:

"It is good business, . . . because physically handicapped employees have a sense of purpose and usefulness in their work. They are new to the dignity of self-support. They have enthusiasm for their work, initiative and loyalty to the job. Too frequently, too many people--particularly employers--regard the physically handicapped as ill or sick people. Consequently, they are unduly alarmed about absenteeism, sick leave, accidents on the job and related factors if they should hire the physically handicapped. The record proves that as far as the Post Office Department is concerned, their fears are groundless. When compared with national averages of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the performance of the physically handicapped is strikingly better than for non-handicapped workers."

He said that what was being done, in essence, was to raise the importance and dignity of handicapped citizens by helping them to engage in useful and gainful work in their communities, and added:

"We take greatest pride in the human values involved in this achievement. However, we should not overlook the fact that the heart warming progress we have made in the reclamation of those formerly considered human rejects is also measured in cold bookkeeping terms of greater community wealth. Think of the savings to society when a man or woman becomes self supporting, rather than depending on support from welfare funds raised by taxpayers!

. . . We realize more than ever today that one of the characteristics of a high culture is a high regard for the individual who has suffered a physical disability."

The remarks made by General Nathan F. Twining, Chief of Staff, U. S. Air Force, were particularly enlightening. His analogy between the physically handicapped and the pilots of our jet planes will make it clear that all of us have physical handicaps of one sort or another and, as he says, handicaps "must be measured in the light of the job to be done." A copy of General Twining's complete remarks is attached for your information.

I strongly endorse these statements and, as a Federal associate member of the President's Committee on Employment of the Physically

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Handicapped, I urge you to help promote a better understanding of the employment potentialities of the physically handicapped within your agency. There are thousands of our citizens with physical impairments who have skills, abilities, and capacities needed in the Federal service.



Philip Young